

# The League of *Extraordinary Seniors*



## Ernestine Shepherd

Ernestine Shepherd isn't your average 75-year old grandmother. In fact, she looks like a superhero. Really! Her abs are a chiseled six-pack. Her biceps, triceps and deltoids look as if they've been sculpted out of marble. She maintains 9 to 10 percent body fat, thanks to a carefully formulated diet consisting of 1,700 calories per day and an exercise regimen that would put some professional athletes to shame.

And to think, before she embarked on her new career as a personal trainer, professional model and competitive bodybuilder, she was a typical couch potato who had never worked out a day in her life. And that was at age 56. Her life was transformed when she and her sister, Mildred, went shopping for bathing suits for a church pool party. They both tried on outfits, took one look at each other, and declared that something must be done immediately. The sisters began taking aerobics and the pounds melted off. When a trainer suggested they add weightlifting to their routine, they resisted at first, thinking they would end up too big and muscular. When he explained that women do not have enough testosterone to grow huge muscles, that weightlifting would help tone their physiques, Mildred tried it and was hooked. After seeing the dramatic results from Mildred's efforts, Ernestine gradually began to follow her older sister's lead. The two had dreams of becoming the oldest living fitness competitors in the world.

Unfortunately, that dream was shattered after little more than a year of training when Mildred began complaining of headaches and died of a brain aneurysm soon after. Ernestine was devastated and stopped exercising. A severe bout of depression followed, complicated by panic attacks, acid reflux and high blood pressure. It took many months of mourning, but eventually she began going to the gym again, determined to fulfill a promise made to her sister to continue what they started: to inspire people to live healthy lifestyles and to be featured in either the *Guinness* book or "Ripley's Believe It Or Not!"

That was back in 2007, when she started running along with training at the gym. Now she has completed nine marathons, won three bodybuilding contests and, as of the 2010 and 2011 editions of the *Guinness Book of World Records*, is listed as the oldest competitive female bodybuilder in the world.

Not bad for a self-described "prissy little girl" who hated to break a sweat.



Department of Aging